

A RACE FOR LIFE.

Talking about hairbreadth escapes and looking over the back fence into eternity, said the man from Kentucky, when the airplane which had followed the Arkansas drummer's bear story had subsided. Well, it didn't turn my hair white, but time has since. You all know, he continued, that I am a Kentuckian by right of birth, but you are not all aware that I was born and reared within a mile of this very spot in which we now sit. Such is the fact, however. What I am going to tell you happened away back in the states. I was just grown up, as straight and tough as a hickory sapling.

We lived at the base of a considerable hill which rose toward the east and stretched its narrow ridge outward for a mile or two. Not 200 yards from our door Isaac Johnson built a modest cabin and brought his family down from Illinois. Dudley, their only boy, was just about my age, although not endowed with like endurance and strength. A warm friendship soon sprang up between us, however, and we spent many hours together in the woods with our rifles.

It was near the end of May, I remember. I had been idle for some weeks, and illness, you know, just at that season, breeds restlessness in superabundance.

I had often heard of the great Mammoth cave, a few dozen miles distant, and I became convinced that the geological formation of the hill in the rear of our home indicated that another huge cave must surely exist under the green turfed mound, for in the valleys which lay at its feet I found numerous sinks from which gurgling brooks usually burst, or from which the warm breath of the internal caverns floated up like the smoke from some mountain wigwag.

I soon confided my conjecture to Dad Johnson. We talked the matter over and decided that on the following day we would begin a series of systematic explorations. The succeeding day, which was bright and clear, though unusually warm, found us setting out with all the necessary paraphernalia—candles, matches, a rope, etc. We had poked around in every crack and cranny, and now upon, having lost all hope, I was about to call it dud, who had wandered off up into a little skirt of wood, when a faint shout reached my ears. I hurried off in the direction whence the voice seemed to come, and was soon standing on the brink of what appeared to be the mouth of our much sought after cavern.

Away down in the bowels of the earth I could see the yellow flare of Dad's candle and faintly discern his outline as he bent forward, peering out into the darkness before him. The descent to his position was easy, and filled with joy I was soon beside him. The sweet darkness, the sepulchral stillness and the constantly trickling drops that fell from the beaded ceiling thrilled me with strange delight. We soon scrambled down from the precipitous ledge on which we stood and began to grope forward, our candles flickering fitfully, as if in danger of being blown out at every step.

We had not proceeded twenty paces, however, in the black winged darkness when we came upon a solid adamantine wall barring our way and seemingly ending our journey. However, after looking around for some time, we decided that we could pass under the obstruction just over the brook, which flowed serenely from beneath its firm breast. The place was very narrow, and to accomplish this resolve we had to get down on our hands and knees in the water. We didn't mind that somehow, and were soon elated to find ourselves in an opening as large as if not larger than the first chamber that we entered, although not nearly so high. From this room we pressed on through a smaller aperture, which gradually assumed the proportion of a passage, dangerous with jutting rocks and dubious windings.

On we hurried, following the tortuous stream that ran pure and pellucid from the immense cave which we assumed ourselves must be just ahead. I can never forget the effect of the low, sweet murmuring of that little brook, loudly audible for the very absence of other sounds. We found it terribly warm, work crawling over rough faced rocks and squeezing through narrow openings; consequently we every now and then halted to rest.

I can't say how long we had been floundering about in the sand and water—when we still held the course of the stream—when a low, roaring reached our ears. A waterfall we at once surmised, certain that a miniature but beautiful Niagara was just before us. Gathering new energy we pushed rapidly forward, and had gone a dozen rods perhaps when the roar, which perceptibly gathered volume, seemed to curiously shift itself into a position immediately overhead, but we did not expect sounds to obey the laws of nature here.

After traversing another dozen rods or so we suddenly noticed that the swelling brook was running madly and bore a few twigs and dead leaves on its hurrying surface. Strangely enough, we were not in the least alarmed, for we thought it was merely a handiwork of our heads. But as the water grew rapidly deeper and muddier I suggested that we should halt a moment, and forcing a small stick in the bank just at the water's edge we watched the rising floods creep up, up about and over it, an inch perhaps in four or five minutes.

Dad looked up at me. "It's raining outside," he said, and his face was as white as a sheet.

The horrifying truth burst upon us simultaneously. Our fright was mutual and our flight precipitous. It was a race for life—we must reach the opening before the stream could fill it and cut off our only exit. All along, as we retreated, I noticed on the low ceiling trash and leaves deposited, even the highest points bearing this positive evidence that at times the whole cave was completely overflooded. Pell-mell over rocks in water we tore; but hurry as we could, the muddy, angry waters still pressed as, swelling and surging between its narrow banks. Now we came to an unusually low point and found the water about our necks as we stopped to pass along. I was in a hell of a fix, and though I set a halting pace Dad in his fright managed to keep up.

These few moments yards seemed insupportable miles, with the floods swelling behind us and the ominous roar overhead menacing us. Now we came to a point where the water was just about our heads, and we were forced to stop and wait. The water was just about our heads, and we were forced to stop and wait. The water was just about our heads, and we were forced to stop and wait.

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What a moment of suspense, of dread, I suffered while waiting for Dad to come up! I hastily scanned the walls of this highest ceiling available, and my heart sank as I saw the unmistakable signs of overflow on every side and overhead. Dad soon joined me, mud begrimed and panting. He looked the devil incarnate dragging himself forth from his home of ooze and slits. But I did not laugh as my terrified gaze rested on his pale and troubled face, you may be sure. I remember feeling a great pity for him, however.

Tremblingly we advanced a few rods and came upon the wall, but, lo, no exit was visible! Now it was concealed by a small pool with a swift maelstrom that swirled, with evident gusto, those bits of wood and leaf which came near its hungry gullet. Weak and overcome with excitement, we sat down on a little knoll, and with the protruding eyes of doomed men watched the steady up crawling of the stream, so different from the song whispering brook of an hour ago. The awful silence was oppressive, while the heavy darkness gathered on every side as if to extinguish our feeble lights. Both of our heads were hatless, and a small stream of crimson trickled from Dad's forehead—a wound that he had received from a jutting rock or some obstacle overhead.

The situation was terrifying. I was almost certain that death was inevitable, but singularly enough my whole attention was centered on my miserable companion. I gazed steadily at him, wondering what his thoughts must be, and if all his past life was hurrying before him in review, as I had often heard it said men's lives would do when death seemed inevitable. Silently and steadily, like some great yellow serpent, the brook crawled into the narrow chamber and coiled fold on fold. We had already moved back to higher ground once, and now it was inching up about our feet again. Our heads were against the highest part of the rock roof, so it would be better to keep our places than to move back to a more trying position which would be no safer.

To my dying day I shall never forget the feelings that crept over me at the water stole up along my body cold and slimy. It seemed that I was being gradually swallowed by some foul monster. The submerged portions of my body seemed severed from the trunk, while sure death enveloped me. A sensation of insufferable closeness almost choked me, while the very helplessness of the situation added a thousand terrors.

Dudley sat as one in a profound stupor, one hand grasping the two inches of yellow turf left, his other scrapping pitifully along the rough wall, as though seeking an exit for his petrified owner. For my part I became strangely quiet after a time, while a sense of indifference possessed me. A sort of resignation to the inevitable, I suppose, for the floods continued to press upward. Our shoulders were now just above the waters, while my hand grew so weary of holding the candle that it seemed as if about to sink below the surface despite my every effort.

Neither of us had spoken for some time, when Dudley suddenly turned to me. "I can't stand it any longer," he said simply. "Tell them goodbye at home for me if you ever get out," and he rose as if to launch himself forward. I saw his object at once and reached out to grasp him. "Hold on, Dad," I said; "I don't believe it is going to get any higher." "It doesn't make any difference," he repeated. "We both can't live long in this small space anyhow," and he sank from view. I felt him touch me as he rolled over, and I clutched at his body to lift him to the surface, but it escaped my grasp and a succession of bubbles told me that further effort was useless—he was drowned. His candle had of course gone with him, and I questioned whether it would not be best for me to extinguish my own, since it was fast exhausting the oxygen that was an absolute necessity to my life. But I could not decide to snuff out that feeble light. It was almost like life itself.

I cannot describe to you my feelings as I sat a hundred feet underground, with only a breathing space of five or six feet about my head, the water at my chin and the cold form of my dead companion at my feet. It seemed as if this mental torture lasted for hours, when, lo, a great joy seized me—the flood had ceased to rise. But its abatement must be far swifter or I would perish miserably from mere exhaustion. In half an hour the water sank so low that I managed to get under the rock, and with loudly beating heart saw once more the bright, sweet light of day. It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and I found that a tremendous rain had fallen, which accounted for the torrent in the cave.

I hurried off to the village as fast as my stiff limbs could carry me and told my story. A score of men went back with me and recovered the body of my comrade.

In that fearful race for life he had saved mine at the cost of his own.—A. B. D. in Short Stories.

Is Protection Responsible for Cholera?
The latest evil for which the tariff is held responsible is the cholera. The Chicago Herald proves it is its complete satisfaction by a chain of reasoning something like this: "Protection increases the prosperity of American workmen, and these make our country a very attractive one for the poverty stricken masses of Europe. Some of the latter, coming from the pestilential centers of the Old World, bring with them the germs of the disease. Hence the tariff brings the cholera!" The remedy is easy. Elect Cleveland, privatize the tariff system, prosperize American workmen, and no foreigners will come here. They will prefer to starve at home. Hurrah for free trade and poverty!

Don't grip your toes too hard. Most workmen do, but don't do it. Half the pleasure derivable from an air tire is lost by overinflation. A little slackness of tire will do no harm and adds much to the luxuriance of the ride.

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Wife—No. I am not feeling well.
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